

Analysis of the strategies used in Bangladesh's Liberation War with West Pakistan against the background of the Cold War

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Abstract

This article intends to analyse the events which unfolded around Bangladesh's War of Independence (1971). In retrospect, initially the war was Bangladesh's attempt at gaining independence from Pakistan, which was to begin with recognition as the country's eastern province. Specifically, the authors want to flesh out the aspects of irregular warfare, insurgency strategy, and the total people's war in a case study. To do this, this qualitative article employs a historiographic analytical lens in its analysis. Furthermore, in its methodology section, the authors outline J.D. Kira's four concepts behind a successful insurgency, and Abdul H. Nasution's proposition of "nationalism" as the article's theoretical framework. These concepts include space, time, support, and legitimacy. The results of this study show that, firstly, the Bangladeshis could utilise the "space" aspect by exploiting geographical differences. Secondly, the events related to natural disasters that occurred gave impetus to the revolt. Thirdly, the world's support highlighted the challenging circumstances for Bangladeshis. Fourthly, Bangladesh acquired legitimacy while advocating for the release of political prisoners from Lahore. Finally, nationalism is showcased in the fight because of the work of intellectuals and nationalists. Overall, Bangladesh's War of Independence produced mixed results with regard to this article's theoretical framework.

Keywords

space, nationalism, Bangladesh's War of Independence, insurgency strategy

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Introduction

The People's Republic of Bangladesh (commonly known as Bangladesh) is a sovereign nation state situated in the eastern portion of the South Asian subcontinent. Geographically, Bangladesh is surrounded by India, mainly its "Seven Sisters State," ranging from Arunachal Pradesh to Assam. Weirdly enough, however, Bangladesh achieved independence not from the neighbour it bordered but from Pakistan, located around 2,000 km to the northwest. British colonisation and the subsequent decline in its influence partly contributed to the overall geographical politics of the said area. The colonial period is said to have started during the 17th century, primarily initiated for trading purposes and later developed into a conquest for glory (Marshall, 1996). The British-supported partition of India conclusively ended former's rule, giving birth to two independent nation states from British India: (1) Hindu-majority India; and (2) Muslim-majority Pakistan. However, Bangladesh was not conceived as an independent state but as an extension of Pakistan's territory (Hossain, 1981).

The region now known as Bangladesh was included in Pakistan as a province with the self-explanatory name of "East Pakistan." The partition, however, was conducted exclusively based on religious lines (Mansergh, 1966). Therefore, it did not correspond to other sociological faults, such as ethnicity. This was showcased in Bangladesh because deducing from its name alone would give us a hint that the word "Bangladesh" is derived from Bengali. The Bengali people then carried out a revolution to seek independence from Pakistan, not just due to the difference in ethnicity but also religion. Although initially Pakistan and its eastern portion materialised as a single nation, Lahore's qualms about the Bengalis' "Hindu-esque" lifestyle forced Bangladesh to follow the way of Islamic interpretation and mannerism (Maniruzzaman, 1975). That unfair enforcement, coupled with other forms of discrimination, led to the Bengalis starting an insurgency in search of their right to self-determination.

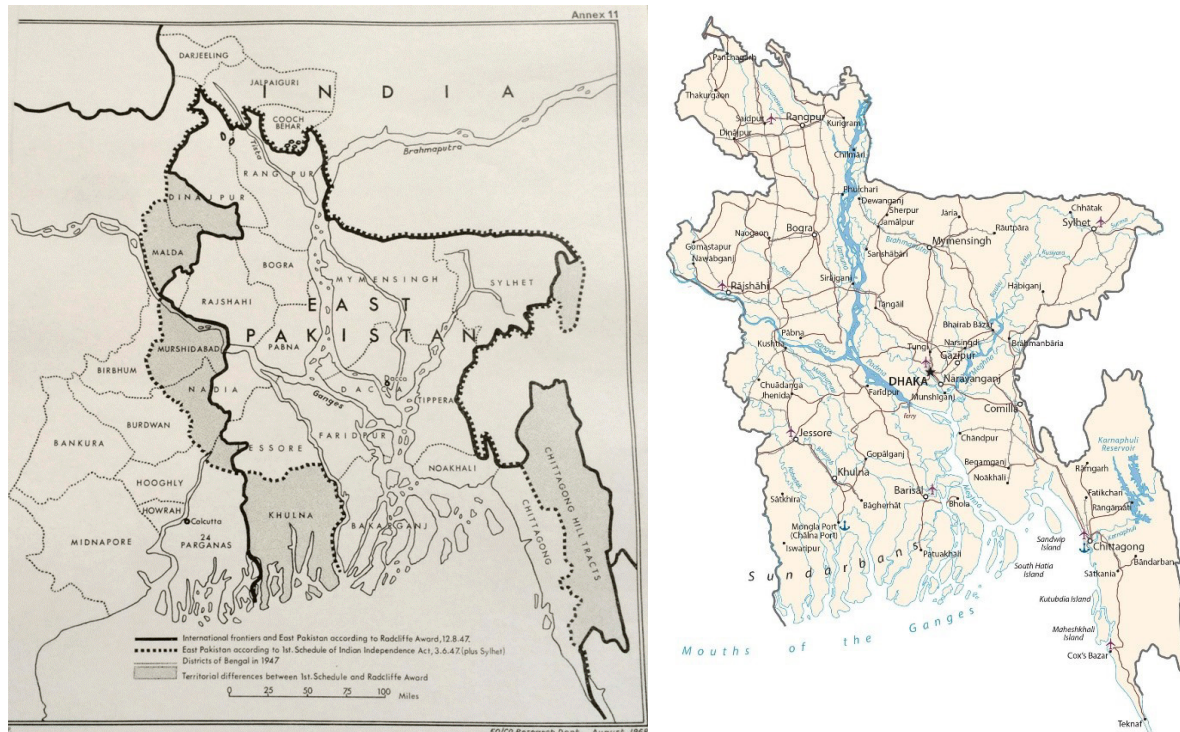
It is not a far-fetched claim that almost every independence movement began as dissent that transformed into an insurgency of some degree (Smith, 2003). However, not all such movements were motivated by identity or what is commonly referred to as the idea of nationalism. Nation, which is often correlated with the concept of the "people," is relevant when discussing the self-determination movement of the Bengali people. This contextual indication may portray as the total people's war. It exists in the form of the eventual churning of almost all Bengalis in the fight, on both intellectual and militaristic fronts (Ahmad, 2018/2019).

On the militaristic front, another concept is also at play—the guerilla type of warfare, in which the Mukti Bahini, the military wing of Bangladesh's independence movement, is engaged. These two concepts of war helped in the formation of this article's main ideas and arguments.

This article uses qualitative research methods in both historical and descriptive directions. The writers also use the relevant literature as its data-collection method and dig up through the data provided in books, documents, and journals. The historical part of this study is conducted through four interlinked stages: heuristics, criticising, interpreting, and building on the historiography. The article is divided into the following three sections excluding the Conclusion: (1) the theoretical framework and plan of usage; (2) the historiography of the event; and (3) theory-based systematic analysis. Delving deeper into the concepts of guerilla and total people's war, this article utilises the explanations provided by Kiras (2019) regarding aspects of the successful insurgency and Nasution's (1965)

Figure 1. Map of Bangladesh, before (1947–1971) and after independence (1971 and the present).

Source: GISGeography (2022); Thomas (2017).



reference to the importance of nationalism in a total people's war. The writers intend to refrain from reviving past argumentation regarding the event but instead want to look for compatibility between the two concepts and the said event.

Theoretical framework

Main idea of insurgency and total people's war

One form of irregular warfare that often unfolds in history is "insurgency." Each analyst might have a differing opinion and understanding regarding the concept. An entirely factual analysis points to every case being one in which small rural groups use light weaponry in a conflictual manner (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). This definition *per se*, however, needs to do it justice because it has discarded the primary goal insurgents are aiming for. In a broader yet much fairer manner, Long (2009) argues that insurgency is the "abnormal" entity's use of any measures in the political and military realm to subvert the system. This particular understanding, therefore, coincides succinctly with Morton's (1975) definition regarding the people's war, which is the coordinated uprising of peasants (represented as an abnormal actor) against imperialist forces (understood as the system owner). Regardless of the motive, if a politically motivated domestic conflict has originated from the "ground up," it might count as insurgency (Simpson, 2018).

As a tactic that is part of the larger insurgency strategy, guerilla warfare constitutes the more operationalised dialectical struggle that oversaw interactions between the involved actors (Gray, 1999). In the case of insurgency, this struggle pertains to the fighting between unrecognised change-seekers and the formal system owner. Therefore, guerilla warfare is an irreplaceable aspect of the people's war. This claim is supported by Smith (2005), who saw the guerilla tactic as extreme utilisation of every element of revolution due to

uneven positioning between adversaries. Those aspects, as well as their significance, are further elaborated below. However, space, time, support, and legitimacy are instrumental in maintaining political revolution, which is the people's war. Its warring nature adds to the writer's considerations that according to Clausewitz's (in [Taber, 1970](#)) argument, guerrilla warfare is also the extension of politics which employed armed conflict. Therefore, the people's war is solidified as both political and militaristic.

The concept of "total war" was first introduced through the writings of Clausewitz. The strategist himself draws upon his understanding from learning Napoleon's war strategy. Entering the 20th century, the concept is renewed by adding the role of "people" to it. The arrangement effectively correlates the strategy even further with Clausewitz's definition of war: the continuation of politics by other means ([Syarifuddin *et al.*, 2021](#)). Politics is often run by the people's will, and through it, resources are governed as well. Therefore, strategists employing total people's war should consider the politics behind each action they took. Furthermore, such consideration is needed because accommodating the needs of the war requires either partial or full mobilisation of soldiers which could take up significant resources. If the politicians saw that the people weren't very keen on accommodating such action, then internal disunity might occur and in turn damage the overall campaign. This short explanation temporarily proves the common definition of the total people's war, which is any politically organised insurrection from the people towards an established order or imperialist forces ([Marks and Rich, 2017](#)).

The situation engulfing the above-mentioned re-conceptualisation paints a much clearer picture of why people are important in that type of war. It is understood that an attempt to revive it emerged during the first half of the Second World War. The primary state actor responsible for the later academic endeavour was the Soviet Union, specifically when Nazi Germany violated their neutrality pact (Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact) in 1941 with Operation Barbarossa ([Fomin-Nilov, 2018](#)). However, the betrayal was not the primary reason for the conceptual addition. It was rather due to the Soviet government mobilising the people in support of their counteroffensive measures. The people mainly rallied to support the efforts, for example, by believing in the correctness of its government's policies ([Edele, 2013](#)). With large territory to defend against the invader, the total people's war strategy was used to achieve the most optimal victorious conditions employing resources, particularly in the manpower sector.

To conduct a successful total people's war, a strategist needs to employ not only the people but two other types of actors: government and military ([Herberg-Rothe, 2007](#)). Even what the people is considered to represent is an amalgamation of different groups of individuals, each with their set of backgrounds and interests in supporting the insurgency. In the governance sector, officials involved must coordinate the war effort, in terms of both resource allocation and politics behind the said endeavour. Since politics gives rise to public office holders, the Clausewitzian definition of war is heavily portrayed with the role of government in extending their politics through war-related policies ([Syarifuddin *et al.*, 2022](#)). Despite being commonly positioned in its traditional role, the military is instrumental to the strategy of total people's war. The military, or militarised wing, of the organisation, must execute military operations through comprehensive planning, considering the factors that are outlined below.

Aspects behind a successful insurgency

[Kiras \(2019\)](#) outlines four essential aspects of a successful insurgency. In the cited writer's opinion, space and time are the most fundamental aspects of the insurgents' campaign. As

we know, insurgents need more options in their undertaking. Therefore, “time” serves as an exchangeable token for their apparent weaknesses, such as a low quality of weaponry and troops. Moreover, due to the aspect’s “timeless” usage, Mao Tse-tung even developed phases that put time as an ally for insurgents: (1) strategic defensive; (2) stalemate; and (3) strategic counter-attack. Correlatively, during a correct period, insurgents may use their opposing state’s inadequate force-to-space ratio, particularly in sensitive assets of the adversaries. Although both aspects may be understood as compensation for the insurgents’ weaknesses, space leans more towards a “game-setter” in the struggle rather than a commodity. The insurgents, in both rural and urban settings, could use their respective terrain to outmanoeuvre the state according to a careful analysis of its space-to-force ratio. By doing this, insurgents could effectively advance their goals in a much more specified area of cooperation.

A successful insurgency campaign primarily rests on the advantageous use of space and time relative to the insurgents’ adversary. However, as stated by [Kiras \(2019\)](#), the often long-lastingness of guerilla struggles forced insurgents to implement two other important factors: (1) support; and (2) legitimacy. Insurgents could start their undertaking, but maintaining it until a successful change requires them to acquire some form of primarily domestic support, but much better than external. The acquisition of domestic support for insurgents ensures that the state cannot effectively use its resources, while externally driven support might provide resources or even sanctuary. Support is interlinked with legitimacy, because the public’s affirmation is an important centre of gravity in an uprising ([Gat, 1989](#)). The said centre might be in the form of “moral superiority,” compared to the state’s aggressive actions. Securing this morality requires the management of both positive and negative measures, such as providing resources to the people or punishing them for mishaps. In hindsight, therefore, legitimacy-creation requires a link between military operations with political ends.

[Nasution \(1965\)](#) was one of the most prominent figures in Indonesia’s fight for independence. In his endeavours, Indonesia needed to effectively utilise its marginal resources, compared to the Netherlands’ more extensive arsenal of weaponry ([Tanjung et al., 2021](#)). Responding to such hardship, he developed the Indonesia-based doctrine of total people’s war (*perang rakyat semesta*), which raised him into the ranks of guerilla military theorists, while being anti-communist himself, alongside Mao Tse-tung and Che Guevara ([Cribb, 2001](#)). In his understanding, [Nasution \(1965\)](#) stated that because it is the people’s war, it must be the “people” who fight and support the military wing of the campaign. A broad amalgamation of people from different backgrounds and social make-ups could risk disunity if it is not centred on the same goal or ideology ([Nurbantoro et al., 2022](#)). In his book, [Nasution \(1965\)](#) understood this condition and argued that nationalism, not simply a change, is a powerful idea to unite a group of people in a particular goal or aim. He compiled the basis of his thought into a book entitled *Fundamentals of guerilla warfare* ([Nasution, 1965](#)). To the writer, the theory of nationalism as a potent force uniting insurgents is not an exclusively Indonesian thing but also a universally applicable condition.

Plan of usage

As mentioned earlier, this study aims to examine how the Bangladeshi people achieved their true independence from Pakistan utilising the concepts outlined in this section. Therefore, the structure of the following section, the systematic analysis, constitutes historiographic analysis corresponding to each of those concepts.

The approach chosen for examining the Bangladesh Liberation War fits in well with the studies of military and strategic theory in general. It gives us a way to view the insurgency that is not only useful for this particular case but also has a lot to say about military tactics and the way conflicts work in general. This approach is based on some of the most important ideas in military and strategic theory. It looks at how the geography of the war zone and the way insurgent forces use space are linked in complicated ways. This is in line with the well-known principles of military strategy, which say that terrain, topography, and space play important roles in operational planning, force placement, and logistical support. Also, the framework's focus on time as a key part of insurgency strategy fits with more general military ideas about the temporal aspect of war. Time manipulation, the timing of operations, and coordinating efforts are well-known parts of military strategy. This framework takes those ideas and applies them to the situation of an uprising. By looking at support dynamics, legitimacy, and nationalism, it is possible to touch on important parts of strategy theory because it shows how important it is to build and keep up support networks, change people's minds, and use the power of ideology and identity.

Using this framework to look at the Bangladesh Liberation War not only helps us learn more about this historical war but it also gives us important information about military and strategic studies as a whole. It shows that military theory can be applied to different kinds of battles and is still useful. It also shows that strategic thinking is based on the same basic principles irrespective of the the situation.

The writers aim to prove that the said war is fought primarily as an insurgent campaign while simultaneously utilising the tactics of guerilla warfare. Skimming through some of the literature, the writers found that Bangladeshi people conduct guerilla warfare in both urban and rural settings, which helped this article to become more varied in its analysis. After analysing the insurgency aspect, the writers shift to highlighting whether or not the war was conducted using the above-mentioned five concepts. It means, therefore, that the writers attempt to locate the usage of aspects of space, time, support, legitimacy, and nationalism within the historiographical presentation of data. This was conducted by analysing the data collected from journals, official publications, historical records, and other entitled data that the writers were able to acquire.

Case study analysis

Utilisation of space

It is safe to state that the war that the Bangladeshi people waged from 1971 to 1972 was a strategic and needed culmination as part of the broader fight for independence. This claim is largely void of the popular understanding of how the country of Bangladesh came into existence. The idea of Bangladesh's independence was factually enabled by its geographical situation. After the British withdrew its forces following the subcontinent's partition, the Dominion of Pakistan, as it was known back then, was created with its geographically separate eastern portion attached to it administratively (Sarkar, 2022). The already representatively unequal East Pakistan people soon realised the irresponsible exploitation conducted by the Lahore administration. The considerable distance plaguing the national catchment area would eventually give birth to much discontent among the populace, even if the cultural differences were not present at the time (European Foundation for South Asian Studies [EFSAS], 2017). Although Bengalis' realisation of the importance of self-determination came much earlier, the brutal suppression by Pakistan after the 1971 election gave rise to the said liberation war.

The 1971 election saw a landslide victory for the Awami Party, marshalled by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and a subsequent massive advantage in the country's parliament. The president, who had the power to ratify the convening of a new parliament, politically adjourned that session without actually opening it in the first place (Sarkar, 2022). This prompted Sheikh Mujib to issue a call for independence, which was eventually met with a brutal crackdown by Lahore. West Pakistan's unwillingness to concede to a political defeat led to the liberation war (March–December 1971). The warring period was a short one compared to other insurgency campaigns around the world. Nonetheless, the Mukti Bahini (the military wing of the revolt) was able to secure victory by implementing several measures associated with the strategy of total people's war.

Originally, the Mukti Bahini was illicitly initiated by the nationalist-stricken Bengalis within the already established military regiment in the province. The writers opine that this militaristic rebellion was, to a certain degree, instrumental in engendering a sense of practical space utilisation in the later guerilla operation, and that Pakistani military officers of Bengali descent were responsible for the strategic division of Bangladesh's territory into eleven parts, which was tremendously helpful for the people's war undertakings. A memoir written by Major General (Ret.) Shafiullah, *1971: A soldier's story*, explained that the Mukti Bahini fighters used the geography and landscape of Bangladesh to their advantage. The country's rivers, swamps, and dense forests provided natural cover for guerilla warfare. They could engage in hit-and-run tactics, making it difficult for the better-equipped Pakistani military to combat them effectively. They established hidden bases and safe havens in remote areas, which allowed them to regroup, rest, and launch surprise attacks.

The division aided in creating a much more specific concentration of space-to-force ratio of the guerilla forces relative to the particular terrain. In the rural portion of the fight, the Mukti Bahini focused its military activities on crucial infrastructures, such as bridges and food silos (Butt, 2017). Albeit different in their fighting nature, students of the largest university in Pakistan—the Dhaka University—aided the guerilla campaign by creating a paramilitary unit called the Mujib Bahini, which was loyal to Bangladesh's founding father. The Mujib Bahini galvanised the population through street revolts and attacks on government areas. Both of these units sustained the total people's war.

Careful considerations of time

As mentioned before, the Bangladesh Liberation War was conducted and ended adequately within just a year. The war was historically and formally fought from March to December 1971. The impetus of the war, however, started in early March with the Awami League's call for independence to the people of Bangladesh. This rally was eventually responded by Lahore's administration with genocidal intent, with instances of the army firing on a protesting crowd in Bangladesh. Almost every month of the warring period was marked with a massacre or battle, which inevitably involved innocent civilians. The first of this war-period massacre would be "operation searchlight," conducted in Dhaka, the urban centre (Bose, 2005). Nevertheless, Bangladesh's guerilla forces eventually liberated some of its territories from the formal control of Pakistan due to careful considerations of time and its associated effect. Furthermore, the Mukti Bahini recognised that time was on their side, as they had the support of the local population and international backing. They were willing to engage in a protracted conflict, wearing down the Pakistani military over time. They made use of international diplomacy and waited for the right moment to strike, knowing that world events and geopolitical considerations would tip the balance in their favour.

Several time-bound opportunities and temporal contextualisation of the conflict also led to the campaign's overall success. Albeit sounding cold-blooded, Bangladesh's political elites' decision to declare their country's independence following multiple massacres of its people was an effective use of time-bound opportunity. If the declaration had taken place later when memory had faded, the people might not have been united under the banner of Bangladesh's independence. Several months prior to the war, Bangladesh was stricken with a tropical cyclone that killed more than five hundred thousand people ([Eskander and Barbier, 2022](#)). The Lahore government could not feel the hardship experienced by its eastern population through its pursuit of a December general election. These time-bound tragedies provided opportunities for effective rallying to start the people's war for Bangladesh's independence.

Other time-related instances of the war are the increasing geopolitical tensions between India, Pakistan, and the broader Cold War actors. Almost all of the actors involved in the Cold War projected some interest in the prospective emergence of a new state in the South Asian subcontinent. Coinciding with the saying, "the enemy of my enemy is an ally to me," Mujib and the Mukti Bahini were decisive in primarily engaging India for support and resources. The following section thoroughly explains this act of support from India ([Marwah, 1979](#)). However, the timeline of the more prominent actors' entrance into the domestic situation reveals how time can be used as a powerful tool to influence specific insurgency campaigns. In this case, the communist resurgence within the domestic politics of Bangladesh and Chinese assertiveness projected a more subtle movement that could potentially have led to infighting among the people while conducting the insurgency. Carefully considering the time aspect within Pakistan's political disarray inside its western territory and the geopolitical interventionist tendency of the Cold War actors gave the revolutionaries an advantageous position.

Support-garnering activities

According to suggestion imparted in the theory section, a successful insurgency campaign requires the continuous support of many actors. Insurgents must carefully craft paths of propagandistic and virtuous actions to garner support from the people at large, the intellectuals, and the political elites of the country they are fighting to change. The more expansive insurgent force of Bangladesh at the time was, however, at one time almost divided itself among the people. Such circumstances emerged due to the battle for prestige and influence between the guerilla Mukti Bahini, who was loyal to the Mujibur Rahman, and the politically organised Awami League, who was starting to approach the problem more pragmatically, rather than following the founding father ideologically ([Maniruzzaman, 1975](#)). This division, in turn, contributed to the muzzling of intellectuals of Bangladeshi descent with the support of West Pakistan. [EFSAS \(2017\)](#) mentioned that the *budhijibis* (the intellectuals) were the primary victims of this intellectual genocide due to the cruelty of Al-Badar, an underbody of the student wing of the Islamist Jammāt-e-Islami in the province. However, other support-related factors ensured that the war was over in less than a year, which was relatively short compared to other similar instances during that particular era.

Revolting amidst a period of global ideological warfare gave the independence-seeking insurgents an advantage in their endeavours. For starters, their "adversary," Pakistan, was aligned with the West, while India was commonly perceived to be strategically allied with the Soviet Union ([Bhagavan, 2019](#)). Prominently, India saw the burgeoning of separatism in Pakistan as a tremendously profitable opportunity to dismember its traditional rival. The eve of the war was marked by a comment from India's Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi,

about the “suppression” of the East Pakistanis’ freedom of speech (Haider, 2009). As time progressed, India’s support evolved more than just in moral form; it even created a western front for the Pakistanis to deal with. Some analysts perceived that the “direct” support was due to the heavy burden that India felt in hosting more than 10 million East Pakistani refugees inside its borders (Murshid, 2011). India was now commonly self-interested in intervening in the ordeal, rather than on the grounds of humanitarianism and the massive support it provided to the Bengalis that was crucial to the insurgent’s success.

Far from the actual tumultuous geopolitical feud on the subcontinent, the Bengalis revolt carried strategic interests and considerations for both the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). For Bangladesh’s freedom fighters, the entrance of the two superpowers provided support and tremendous challenges. Owing to immense influence of the United States on the United Nations Security Council, its continuous rejection of the escalation of conflict entangled India with barriers to full militaristic measures in the battle (Murshid, 2011). The US interests behind its standards stemmed from its alliance with Pakistan, especially during the proxy war in Afghanistan. On the other side, the USSR was not shy in supporting the Bangladeshis, particularly in defending its maritime areas. It was reported that various kinds of Soviet warships sailed close to the Chittagong Port, responding to the prior threat of American military presence in the area (Sengar, 2022). The challenges faced by America and the western allies of the Mukti Bahini meant that the contradictive adversary was able to support India in its respective endeavours in the Bangladesh Liberation War, which provided the insurgents with adequate support.

Safeguarding legitimacy for the insurgents

Insurgents need to secure legitimacy to sustain their campaign, particularly from the people’s perspective. In the discussed case, Bangladesh derived its legitimacy from various aspects, such as culture and geography, the brutality of Pakistani authority, and external actors’ voices. Legitimacy itself is quite a different term relative to general support. Gawthorpe (2017) suggests that the principle of open market applies to the people choosing the most legitimate actors. However, cultural faultline plays an instrumental role concerning such market logic that organic legitimisation effort is bound to the people. In a much more strategic context, “legitimacy” acts as a node to the Clausewitzian trinity, to which any insurgency must balance it out with security and effective policy (Friedman, 2014). Engaging in providing the most secure options for the populace and governing with extreme effectiveness might acquire the insurgents’ popular support. However, locally ensuing revolution must be heeded by insurgents with policies that are in line, or even based, on the cultural characteristics of one place. One instance of this was shown through Mukti Bahini’s advocacy for East Pakistanis detained to practice their cultural beliefs (Zillman, 1974).

During the Bangladesh Liberation War, when the Mujibnagar government was operating in exile, it took important steps to establish itself as a legitimate authority and win foreign support. Its main goal was to make a viable alternative to the government of Pakistan. To do this, the Mujibnagar government put together a plan with different parts. One important part was helping the civilians who were running away from the horrible things the Pakistani military was doing (Batabyal, 2021). This not only helped with the immediate humanitarian disaster but it also showed how much they cared about the people of Bangladesh. At the same time, the government put a lot of effort into recruiting and persuading more people to join the guerilla forces. This was done to ensure that there was strong resistance to the Pakistani forces. They also knew how important it was to

communicate well, so they used different types of media to spread the nationalist message not only to the people of East Pakistan but also to the rest of the world. The Mujibnagar government that knew it needed help from other countries, so it sent diplomats to India and other countries to get political support for Bangladesh's independence. These political efforts helped get support from other countries, which was a key part of the insurgency's success in the end (Barabyal, 2021).

The Lahore administration's insensitivity to the distinct cultural needs of the Bengali majority in East Pakistan gradually reduced the legitimacy of its political elites. As mentioned before, legitimacy pertains to how well a political entity tends culturally to the needs of its people while alleviating measures to secure their support (Bachmann and Prazauskas, 2019). On the administrative front, the war started because of Lahore's illegal delegitimation effort to disregard East Pakistan's voice in choosing the Awami League for Parliament (Sarkar, 2022). Fearing an adverse reaction if East Pakistan mobilised its political aims through the legislative chamber, the Pakistani lawmakers ultimately disregarded its culturally unified eastern province. The Bengalis could feel further delegitimation towards Lahore because of the brutality it showcased during the peaceful protests before the actual war. When support cannot be achieved through effective mobilisation of pro-public policies, political entities, at the very least, must keep a balanced cultural view. The absence of this served as a foundation for Mukti Bahini to capitalise during the insurgency.

Nationalism

Nasution (1965) and his insurgency guidelines for total people's war had a unique twist relative to other strategists. The crucial difference relates to how he views that change of the *status quo* as driven based on nationalism more than the mere logic of market governance (Cribb, 2001). Both Awami League and Mukti Bahini had engendered nationalism in most people in East Pakistan. The nationalist sentiment was first showcased with the rallying of voices by the party just before the parliamentary election in 1971. Maniruzzaman (1975) found that the Awami League galvanised the narrative that every vote for it was equivalent to supporting the principles of nationalism. The need for violent activities to support a successful total people's war was also met with the triggering of nationalism. This is proved by Jahan's (2002) commentary that Bangladesh's nationalist movement included aggressive actions, which made it different from other nationalist movements at the time.

Despite Nasution (1965) calling nationalism the stronger binder of various people groups which seek change, other factors come into play, influencing the dynamics of such campaigns. For instance, although ethnic nationalism seems to fit with the context of Bangladesh's War of Independence, it does not stop the Jamaat-e-Islami, despite being similar in ethnic origins, from supporting the West Pakistanis instead of their brethren (EFSAS, 2017). Before that, however, nationalism has been vigorously promoted in Bangladesh, particularly in the urban area of the then province. Ahmad (2018/2019) mentioned that intellectuals and students of Dhaka University aided in the creation of a fundamental basis for essentialising Bangladesh's nationalism. The movement at Dhaka University proved so crucial for the entire people's war that every aspect of the campaign either culminated or ended up at the wards of the university. From the intellectual basis of nationalism, the more operationalised nationalist movement in the military area was sustained even further.

In addition, in the Mukti Bahini leadership, the authors take an example from a memoir written by Major General (Ret.) Shafullah, 1971: *A soldier's story*. The writer was a

decorated Bangladeshi military officer who played a significant role in the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. He served as the Chief of Staff of the Bangladesh armed forces during the war. Nationalism existed strongly in Bangladesh soldiers as well as the role of Bangladesh armed forces in the struggle for independence. Their nationalism was proved by their spirit of patriotism and sacrifices made by soldiers and civilians alike, which characterised the Bangladesh people's struggle for independence. Secondly, *Ekattorer dinguli (Days of '71)*, a memoir written by Jahanara (1986) that weaves a personal story with the political future of the country, is a moving eyewitness account of the nation's 9-month freedom war. The story describes her shock at finding a bomb component and two large pestles and mortars (to grind) hidden in Rumi's closet, her awareness that thousands of masked soldiers were flown to East Pakistan and ships carrying weapons were arriving at Chittagong harbour, and the futile negotiations between political leaders—Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Yahya Khan, and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. It also describes her agony after deciding to give Rumi permanent hair, at guerilla freedom fighters hiding in Imam's house, the rearrangement of furniture in her living room, and, finally, hoisting of the Bangladesh's flag. Philip Hensher writes in *The Guardian's* review of the English translation of *Ekattorer dinguli* that “just as the Holocaust needed a Diary of Anne Frank that brought the numbing total of deaths down to an individual, human case, so the Bangladeshi massacres are brought down to the feelings of a mother for her son” (Imam, 1986).

Conclusion

This article primarily discussed the Bangladesh Liberation War which took place in 1971. The war and its related escalation culminated in the dissatisfaction of the Bengali-dominated East Pakistan province with its treatment by Lahore. According to the review that we conducted, the unfair treatment ranged from political and administrative issues to fundamental human rights. The first unfair act was the deliberate delegitimation of the result of the parliamentary election and its failure to certify it, which saw the Awami League, the independence party of East Pakistan, win a significant vote. The second act was that of the Lahore administration's fervent muzzling of dissent and protests from the people, despite it being conducted peacefully. These two types of unfair treatment led the Mukti Bahini and Bangladeshi forces to carry out a total people's war against West Pakistan.

In analysing the extent of the measures relating to how the Bangladeshi people conducted their insurgency campaign, the writers employed some categorisation which could help elucidate upon the ordeal. Those categorisations were derived from [Kiras' \(2019\)](#) opinion about essential factors in a successful insurgency and [Nasution's \(1965\)](#) proposition regarding nationalism in the said strategic situation. Firstly, space relates to how effective insurgents are in applying considerations regarding force-to-space ratio for them as well as their adversaries. Secondly, time is commonly acknowledged as a currency that could compensate for the insurgents' relative weakness by carefully crafting the steps. Thirdly, support from internal and external stakeholders provided insurgents with many perks, such as protection and moral boosts. Fourthly, legitimacy ensures that an insurgency is considered the “righteous” choice for the people to follow through. Finally, nationalism acts as a more robust binder of various groups of people affected by the insurgents than the basic market logic of governance.

Insurgents in the Bangladesh Liberation War mainly followed through with categorisations, given that the campaign only lasted for a year. However, there were some challenges that the Mukti Bahini and Bangladesh faced inside those categorisations. In space, the Mukti Bahini could concentrate its army in significant areas of the formal administration,

which created strategic losses for West Pakistan. Provided the war lasted for less than a year, it could be inferred that Bangladesh's forces used their time aspect well, especially during crucial moments in the war's timeline. The front for garnering support, the Indo-Pakistan rivalry, aided the Bengalis in their fight as well as prevented India from giving the most available support to Bangladesh. However, legitimacy was something that Bangladesh's political elites could capitalise upon through the reverberance of Pakistan's horrendous treatment of its people. Furthermore, nationalism was instilled for a prolonged time in Bangladesh, with notable contributions of Dhaka University's intellectuals.

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